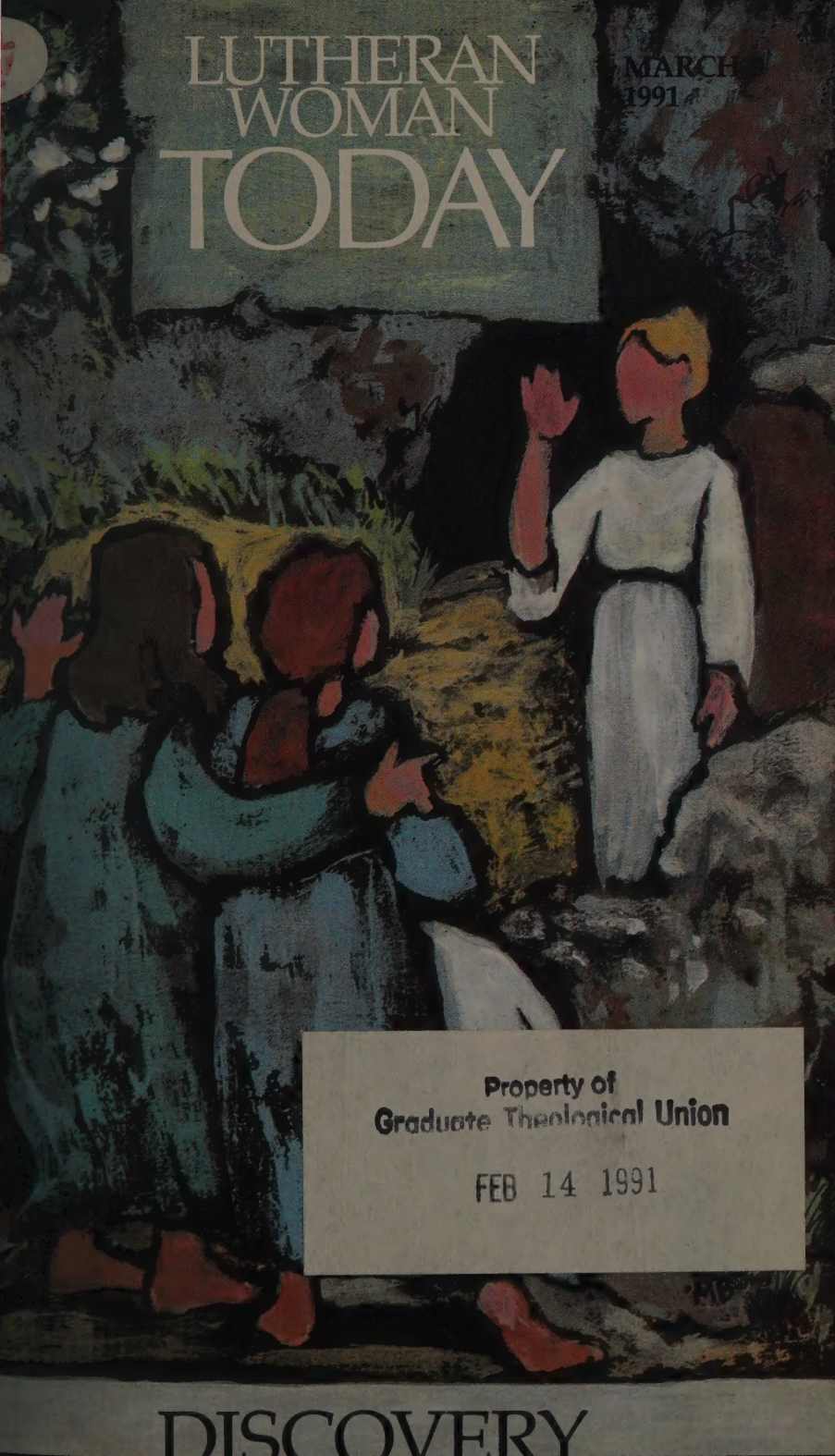


# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

MARCH  
1991



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FEB 14 1991

# DISCOVERY

## Cover meditation ♦♦

**N**ot long ago, I made a wonderful discovery in a small Episcopal church in my neighborhood. Above the altar, in the most prominent window of the church, was a depiction of the discovery of the empty tomb. Pictured at the scene were several women and a rather female-looking angel. What surprised me at first was that Jesus was not featured in this work of art. Then I became aware that this was the first time I had seen a stained-glass window whose subjects were all women. Of course, it is this story of the discovery of the empty tomb that is the central faith event in Christianity—the discovery that the God thought dead is actually alive—the discovery that the world and its possibilities are more than we have ever known. And yet, the story of the discovery of the empty tomb is probably one of the most underused stories of our faith. Since Jesus isn't in the story, isn't in the picture, we often hurry past it.

For Christians, the process of dis-

covery is not only for children and scientists. Discovery is at the heart of our experience. Our faith is conceived and renewed in discovery. From that first early morning at the tomb until the present, women and men of faith continue to discover God alive in places we thought God dead. In the life of a young person who hasn't been to church since confirmation; in the turning of ancient hostilities to harmony; when some purpose emerges from the chaos of our lives; in the welcoming spirit of a formerly closed community; in the discovery of a new depth and strength of our own faith.

Reflect today on your own recent discoveries of God alive in your lives in the lives of those you love, and in your community. As you do, you may pray: "God, I have discovered your living presence anew. Empower me to go and tell. Alleluia! Amen."

*Mary W. Andersen  
Oak Park, Illinois*

### **ON THE COVER:** "Discovery" by Margaret Bussey, Minneapolis, Minnesota

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# Rediscovery

Bernadine Weeg

**We were all tired.** Our senior group had been to a drama festival in nearby Canada and it had been a long day. Just as we were settling into the comfortable seats of our chartered bus, the driver suggested we might stop at Niagara Falls before returning home to Rochester, New York. We weren't enthusiastic, as most of us had seen the falls many times.

But Vera, a new member of our group, spoke up. "I've never seen the falls; I'd like to go."

Everyone on the bus looked at her.

"How can that be?" one man said. "It's only an hour's drive from home."

"I've just moved here to live with my daughter," she replied.

Of course we all agreed to stop, and on the way we reminisced about previous visits and about the days when we brought our children to see this beautiful sight.

As the bus approached the park, we could see the familiar clouds of mist rising from the Niagara River below. As we anticipated our friend's reaction to this new experience, we felt almost like it was our first time again.

**When the bus stopped,** the driver escorted Vera to the protective wall where she could enjoy the full panoramic view.

The rest of us joined her there, now eager for another look at that incredible display of God's power and goodness.

Vera was crying for joy, as were most of us. Through another's eyes we rediscovered our own appreciation of this awe-inspiring sight.

Occasionally something like this happens to renew our sense of wonder at the good things in our lives. The monumental natural wonders—and our more commonplace blessings—are brought into sharper focus.

**If only we could greet every day** with such awareness of God's love for us! Too often we take our many blessings for granted: our loved ones, our home, sufficient food, clean water, new challenges every day.

*Thank you, God, for all your blessings. Please let me always be grateful for your goodness, and always aware of your love for me.*

*Bernadine Weeg, a free-lance writer, is a member of Holy Name of Jesus parish in Rochester, New York.*

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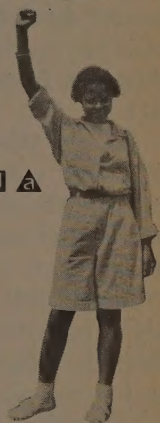
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"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). ◻ ● ▲

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the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked with these symbols: ▲ = action, ● = community ◻ = growth.

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## Editor's note ♦♦

Readers will discover two new additions to this month's Lutheran Woman Today. First, we introduce a new column titled "Give Us This Day." The Rev. Donna Hacker Smith and Karen Melang usually will alternate writing the column, but this month readers are treated to thoughts from both (see pages 28-31).

As the title suggests, "Give Us This Day" will look at the devotional in daily life, offering a personal perspective on matters of the spirit and heart.

Pages 22-27 offer an exciting entry: The 1990 index of Lutheran Woman Today articles. When LWT was young, we could more readily remember that Jan Brosen wrote "Affirming Our Gifts" in June 1988 and that Susan Krass' "On Being Devotional" appeared in July of that year. But by the third year, our human database was tested beyond limit. Perhaps yours was too. For instance, in which issue did that article on family literacy appear? ("Two R's: Reading and Relationships" was in the September 1990 issue.)

A reliable, convenient reference is good, but can an index be *exciting*? Constance Lovaas Beck, who compiled the indexes, pointed to the exciting element. Constance, formerly editor of *Scope* (a predecessor magazine to LWT) reread every article in the first three years of LWT. "What a difference it made to read the issues back to back," she told us. "What ground LWT has covered! I hadn't realized how well the issues all tied together."

We, too, found ourselves delighting in LWT's short history as we re-what Constance had prepared. For the categories she used are meaningful. Some of them include: Bible study, care of creation, Christian v-ness, global concerns, healing, justice/peace, mission/ministries, personal/spiritual growth, relationships, stewardship.

As we plan each issue of Lutheran Woman Today, we begin with a prayer of supplication and thanksgiving. We know the ground we cover is huge and we ask God's spirit to guide us. We know, too, that LWT does not come out by our labors alone. Each issue comes together by the grace of God—guiding writers, editors, artists, people in production and distribution, readers.

Watch for the index cataloging the 1988 and 1989 issues of Lutheran Woman Today in the March 1991 *Action Packet* (mailed to Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations) and the Spring/Summer 1991 Women of the ELCA packet (mailed to congregational units of the women's organization). As you review the 1990 index found here, you might ask yourself: What were my favorite articles? Which articles did I share with someone else? Which ones made me angry? What did I miss that I could catch up on now? What might I discover or recover by reading an index?

*Sue Edison-Swift*

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

# DISCOVERY:

## God's Caravan of Gifts

Lily R. Wu

Discovery comes so naturally to children. Every day is filled with wonder and surprise as they marvel at nature and venture into new thoughts, new ideas. But what a joy it is at any age to feel the sudden warmth of a discovery flood through us, to delight at what we have found.



"For now we see in a mirror dimly," 1 Corinthians 13 says, "... Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (verse 12, Revised Standard Version). Discovery is a split-second touch, beyond words, from the spirit of God, in an infinite array of chances for us to become aware, to understand, to appreciate, to grow to our fullest potential. Even though we won't realize love fully until we see God face to face, God touches us throughout our lives through the many realizations that we call "discovery."

Knowing this, we cherish discovery—this often fleeting, elusive quality of life. Deep in our hearts we are all explorers. We travel on a journey of heart, mind and spirit. We look for love, meaning, happiness, fulfillment. As human beings, we are created that way. We need to discover, as much as we need to live and breathe.

And God is so good to give us such moments of discovery, a caravan of gifts to unwrap throughout our lives. Now the question is: Do we wait for the gifts, or do we look for them? Can we "train" ourselves to be explorers, to make more

What a joy it is  
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we have found.



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touch, beyond  
words, from the  
spirit of God.



discoveries, to find more gifts to unwrap.

I believe so. Sometimes discovery does “happen” to us, delighting us, surprising us. But we can prime ourselves to be explorers too. Explorers don’t sit at home and wait. They prepare themselves; they have a goal and a destination. They might find something new or something better along the way. But that’s because they were *on* their way somewhere in the first place.

We should expect some mystery in life. The very nature of the word *discovery* implies that something was previously hidden. We need to get past the covering, remove the wrapping and bring things to light or the discovery will not be made.

But the truth is that sometimes we don’t *want* to discover. The older we get and the more we know, the more we sometimes don’t want to know. We don’t want to know or experience loneliness, disappointment, illness or sorrow. Or mean-spiritedness, racism, sexism, elitism, hatred, pain, war. These are discoveries, too, though we can hardly bear to think of them that way. And then there are the most difficult discoveries of all: the ones with ourselves, ones we’d rather not face.

The temptation is great for us to recognize only the discoveries that give us a blaze of warm feelings inside. We train ourselves to recognize certain kinds of wrapped gifts, and then choose only those to unwrap. Remember when you thought only big packages contained exciting gifts?

Sometimes we refuse the gift. “No more surprises, God, please!” we say. “I know what I like. I can’t take much newness. I just got comfortable!” It’s easy to close ourselves off from new ministries, new perspectives, new experiences, and leave them to those more daring and risk-taking.

Meanwhile, as we contemplate what we want to uncover or not, God knows us, is ready to forgive us, and waits for us. The world goes on—a whirlwind of sorrow, joys, suffering and healing.

If we limit ourselves, we will miss the greatest discovery of all: that God will be with us, and that God has a purpose for us through *all* the discoveries of our lives, whether we deem them good or bad.

Human discovery is always a gradual process. There is a time to contemplate, and a time to take action. We learn when to speak and when to listen. We discover there are ways to learn what we don’t know, and that there are people who will help. Step by step, we discover



God is not only with *us*, but also with people whose lives and experiences are very different from—people of other races, cultures, points of view, experiences.

God sends us a caravan of gifts to discover in our time. Each person we encounter, each experience, is an opportunity to unwrap and discover the God offers therein. ■

*R. Wu is associate for communications at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, secretary on the board of the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America and a member of Bethany Lutheran Church in Elmhurst, New York.*



## Timing the Pump

### Discovery . . .

Like getting ready for a trip to a place we've never been. Seasoned travelers would:

**Have a plan.** They find maps, chart their route, have a purpose. As travelers, we have God's word for direction. Since opportunities and plans arise at various stages of our lives, we need to consider how God is calling us to serve.

**Be flexible.** Even the best of plans may need to change. When we recognize the value of new possibilities, and prepare to adapt ourselves, we clear a path for discovery.

**Learn how to be intercultural.** Experienced travelers know their journey is enriched when they meet travelers from other cultures and experiences. They find that developing their own sensitivities and spirit of acceptance enhances that intercultural exchange. Similarly, when we develop our multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills, we are able to exchange ideas, work together more effectively and make many new discoveries, for the benefit of all who travel.

**Ask friends for advice—or travel with experienced friends.** What a relief it is to know someone who's "been there," someone who can be a "wise person"—giving us advice and tips from their experience.

**Keep a journal.** This offers us an excellent way to chart our personal growth and reflect later on the discoveries we have made!—LRW

# Surprise Me: Prayer and Discovery

Karl Reko

Paul has some intriguing words about prayer in Romans 8: "... the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought. . . ." (verse 26). If we do not know how to pray, then why should we keep doing it? Perhaps in these words Paul is nudging us toward a new discovery.

People who write about prayer offer a wide variety of opinions about what happens when we pray. Some feel that things will stay the way God has decided they should be, and through prayer we adjust to God's decisions. Others feel that the purpose of prayer is to make a difference in the way God decides things.

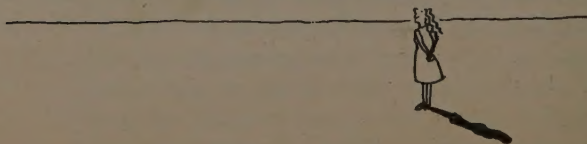
Who changes in prayer, the pray-er or God? We have all seen the bumper stickers that encourage us to "Expect a Miracle," to believe that God will suspend the natural flow of events to answer our prayer. In such prayer we are working to discover a

God who gets motivated to act in a special way, because of our prayer.

Other Christian writers see the purpose of prayer as moving the person praying to change. In prayer "... a person uses the energy of his mind to direct the movement of his living toward the finest goals he can create," writes Edgar Jackson in *Understanding Prayer* (Harper & Row 1968).

In the October 1990 *Sojourner* magazine, Walter Wink seems to suggest that prayer changes both God and the pray-er. He writes that intercession "changes the world and ... changes what is possible to God ... An aperture opens in the praying person, permitting God to act without violating human freedom."

My work as a career-planning consultant gives me another perspective. When someone by choice or necessity is making a career change, the need for discovery becomes





ite. The most common question a Christian in career transition asks is: How can I discover what God wants me to do with my life?

In a transition, big or small, we seek to discover the will of the One who made us. When we

find ourselves in a transition where either the doors are all shut, or there are too many doors from which to choose, our concept of prayer becomes relevant quickly. In such a situation I find helpful a definition of prayer that goes something like this: *Prayer is God's creative way of helping us discover our role in the redemption of a world God is busy redeeming.*

From that perspective, the point of prayer is *not* to discover the secret plan for my life hidden away in God's mind. Rather, the point is that God has already told me the plan by creating me a certain way at birth with certain skills, passions and preferences. Prayer allows for the discovery of new possibilities that the cross opens up for a redeemed "pray-er" in a world being redeemed. In conversation with the ongoing Creator, prayer points us to the flashing neon sign: "Redemption in Progress."

When we pray, most of us have found that our "basic me" hasn't changed much over the years. But the way we use our "basic me" *does* change through prayer. Redeemed skills can be used creatively and re-emptively: same me/new motivation and purposes, same skills/new uses.

When we pray, most of us see a world basically similar to the one we were in when we prayed years ago.

"An aperture  
opens in the  
praying person,  
permitting God to act  
without violating  
human freedom."

Walter Wink

But like a critical mass in a nuclear reactor, God has been at the center pumping redeeming energy through the universe. Prayer is God's way of putting a "redeemed me" in touch with a world God is in the process of redeeming.

Who changes in prayer, God or the pray-er? Maybe that's the wrong question. Maybe that isn't the kind of discovery to which prayer leads us. Discovery does happen when we pray, but by its nature it is unpredictable.

A friend with whom I do career-planning workshops tells a story he attributes to a sage bishop. A person asked a counselor to help her discover God's will for her life. The counselor asked her, "What would you do if Jesus walked into church and sat down next to you?"

The woman answered, "After I recovered from the shock, I would ask Jesus, 'My Lord, what do you want me to do with my life?'"

"Do you know what I think Jesus would reply?" said the counselor. "Jesus would probably say, 'Why don't you surprise me?'" ■

*The Rev. Karl Reko, River Forest, Illinois, is associate director for training in the ELCA Office for Personnel. He and his wife, Ruth Reko, have two children.*



# SURPRISED *by* Joy

Ruth Harrison Martin

*In Surprised by Joy C. S. Lewis writes of his journey to Christianity. Lewis was born into a Christian family and as a child practiced his faith in childlike ways.*

Like most of us, he questioned his faith somewhere between childhood and maturity. After his mother died and he was installed in the British boarding-school system, Lewis began asking questions about why humanity exists. His answers led him to years of atheism.

Lewis' question is a difficult but common one. For what purpose *does* humanity exist? The Christian may answer that humanity exists to glorify God, the Creator. Humanity exists to worship God, to share the gospel, to be "little Christs." These are simple words with complex meanings. Our struggle with these concepts brings growth to our Christianity.

Lewis concluded early that the quest for *Joy*—that elusive, fleeting something that touches one occasionally and haunts one's desire—drives human existence. Joy, in Lewis' definition, is not the joy of laughter with schoolmates, or reunions with family during holidays. Joy, with a capital J is a wonderful momentary intensity of feeling that one wants to keep forever, but lasts only a moment. Joy is "an unsatisfied desire which . . . is more desirable than any other satisfaction" (pp. 17-18).

Lewis' early experiences with Joy came from poetry and music. He found, however, that Joy could not be produced on demand. Replicating a poem or a musical piece did not necessarily replicate Joy, only the knowledge that Joy existed and that he desired it more than anything else.

Where is Joy in Christian life? Joy can be anywhere: in our relationships, work, experience. What, then, is the significance of Joy? Joy is a gift from God that leads us to God. Joy in the Christian context does not need a capital J be



cause joy is not an end in itself. God needs a capital G, and thankfully, God gives us joy.

As we grow in faith, we discover God's signs all over—a beautiful sunrise, the opportunity to work, the opportunity not to work, conversation with a friend, the smile of a stranger. Joy, in people and places and situations, points to the daily opportunities we are given to be God's children, not just God's creation. In the thrill and pain of joy, there is always a thank-you. Lewis' atheistic Joy included a thank-you also; he just didn't know whom to thank.

Sometimes joy escapes us. Psalm 30:5 offers us comfort: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (King James Version). We are God's creation, but we are in a state of sinfulness, a state of brokenness. Because of this brokenness, sometimes we cannot see opportunities to experience joy. We never know how long our individual nights will be, but God assures us through Jesus that there is morning. Joy that leads us back to God is available for our taking. God's grace is sufficient.

C. S. Lewis' journey from Christianity to atheism to theism back to Christianity explores joy, and he is surprised by what he discovers. Lewis' story is more than an autobiography. It offers the reader an opportunity to examine her own life and approach to life. Each of us is endowed by God with free will. We can choose to recognize God's signs leading us into relationship with God or we can ignore them. Lewis did both. He shares his experience with us that we may see God and our lives in Christ more clearly.

Pick up a copy of *Surprised by Joy* from your church library, local bookstore, or Augsburg Fortress location. Challenge yourself to examine your faith and grow with C. S. Lewis. Other Lewis books you may want to read include *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain* and the Chronicles of Narnia series that begins with the popular *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

*Ruth Harrison Martin is a legal research librarian and has been involved in Lutheran parish libraries for 15 years on the local, regional and national levels. She serves on the board of directors for the Lutheran Church Library Association.*



*Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* by C. S. Lewis, published by Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich (\$5.95), is available from Augsburg Fortress (code 40-687011-34).

# God's

# SURPRISES...

Debbie Trafton O'Neal

Karen is one of many people who volunteer at an AIDS House in Seattle, Washington—a house for people with AIDS who have no other place to go.

Karen made a discovery at the AIDS House.

"There was a new resident of the AIDS House the last time I was there," Karen recalled. "I had been working in the garden, pulling weeds and cleaning up the flowerbeds and I had just come into the kitchen. The new resident was making his way around the kitchen, introducing himself to the people making lunch.

"When he came to me, I laughingly held up my dirt-covered hands and said, 'Hi, I'm Karen. I'd shake hands with you but mine are so dirty!'

"He grasped my soiled hands and said, 'That's OK. I don't mind.'"

By telling this story, Karen shared a discovery she had made about acceptance and caring. The story reminds us of God's acceptance and caring, even of our soiled lives.

The word *discover* means to make known or visible, or to obtain sight or knowledge for the first time. To me, discovery is

like a hidden picture, the kind of picture that looks like one thing upon cursory inspection, but yields many small surprises upon closer examination.

Sometimes circumstances and situations beyond our control can be the catalyst for a discovery. And often discovery opens another door or window that helps us to understand ourselves, our lives and our relationships better. What have you discovered about yourself or your life recently?

Children are good discoverers perhaps because they don't have the responsibilities or burdens that are a part of adulthood. Does a childlike attitude make one a better discoverer? If so, how might adults make discovery a regular part of their lives? Some ideas:

## Taking risks.

Discovery can be enlightening and freeing. It can also be stressful and painful. Sometimes making a new discovery means we will have to make difficult choices, or do something we're not sure we're ready to do. Risking the pa

Discovery is like a hidden picture, yielding many small surprises upon closer examination...



ever, allows us to experience the  
of new discoveries as well.

### Being open to creativity.

de in God's image, we are all "cre-  
rs," whether we bake or crochet or  
d Bible studies or counsel preg-  
nt teenagers. Sharing ourselves  
atively opens us to the possibility  
discovery.

### Trying something new.

like a list of things you'd like to try  
learn or find out about, and then

do it! Use your list to discover new  
things about yourself, God, and other  
people in your life. Use your list to  
discover what a difference you can  
make in someone's life.

Find out what surprises God has  
waiting for you to discover! ■

*Debbie Trafton O'Neal is a free-lance  
writer and author of My Read-and-  
Do Bible Storybook (Augsburg, 1989)  
and An Easter People (Augsburg,  
1986). She lives in Kent, Washington,  
with her husband and three daugh-  
ters.*

## A starter list for discoveries

- If you always read spy thrillers, try reading poetry or a novel.
- Take a walk and look for God's surprises in nature.
- If you usually drive to work, take a bus or ride your bike. Take a new route or go at a different time.
- Take a course in something you have always wanted to know more about.
- Volunteer somewhere you normally wouldn't. Say yes to something you'd like to do in church before you're asked!
- Do something "outrageous." (You get to decide what "outrageous" is.)
- Read a children's book like *Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown or *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. Do these books reveal God's love to you in a new way? How so?
- Say the Lord's Prayer first thing in the morning.
- Have you read anything in the Old Testament lately?
- Talk to a new member during church fellowship time.
- Cook foods from different countries or eat different food in a restaurant.
- Hike to the highest point in your area and look around.
- If you're a fan of the arts, get tickets to a ballgame instead.
- Discover a memory. Look at old photos, play a game you haven't in years, call up an old friend.
- Write your own discovery ideas down and have fun trying them!

—DTO

# Lent and the Mind of Christ

Karen Burgess-Cassler



I always thought a “Lenten discipline” was the church’s version of a New Year’s resolution—“I’ll really crack down on myself, clean up my act and get virtuous.” The discipline had to be unpleasant, even grim: fasting, doing without meat or chocolate or desserts, taking on an intense new exercise routine—a sort of “no pain, no gain” approach to spirituality.

The good part about it, I’d tell myself, was that I didn’t have to live with it permanently. (And I can endure nearly any amount of virtue as long as it only lasts six-and-a-half weeks.) My assumption was that Lent is about pain and punishment about hating our bodies and seeing only sin in our lives.

But I’m convinced that’s not the best way for us to think about living out our Baptism, exploring the death of our old selves and our birth as God’s new daughters and co-workers. God reaches out to us no matter what the circumstances of our lives, as sure as in grief and loss as in secure and happy times. But when we choose to treat ourselves harshly, do we make it easier to hear God calling, encouraging, challenging, healing? I think not, for there are better ways.

One way to keep the tradition of Lenten discipline without flogging ourselves is to use some repetitive task or occurrence as a new opportunity to contemplate God’s grace throughout the day and night. For instance, a friend of mine, who drives a great deal in her job, tries to thank God for something at each stoplight when she passes a McDonald’s, sh



for people who are hungry. Another friend, with twins, prays every time she changes a diaper. The hardest Lenten discipline I undertook was the simplest one. Every year I decided to pay attention to my food while I was eating it. I wasn't trying to lose weight, or improve the kinds of things I ate; I simply tried to notice the food that was going down. I especially resolved not to read at meals. What a battle! I had to leave the newspaper in the living room, and put the cereal box on the

table. I discovered that for me it was not just to let myself enjoy eating without distraction. All the things that food can imply—health or illness, creativity, celebration, family connection and tradition, being satisfied, having enough—I had trouble accepting and experiencing fully. Because of the discipline, my relationship with that enemy to be subdued but never conquered—became more like a eccentric acquaintance worth getting to know a bit better.

With many opportunities for reflection—at least three times a week—I started wondering what other times in my life God was trying to tell me that I wasn't willing to accept, or enjoy being freely cared for. The psalmist's call to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8, NRSV) became a new challenge addressed to me.

On Passion Sunday we hear, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:5-7, New Revised Standard Version). What does it mean for us to imitate Jesus not just in our actions, but in our mind—that is, by the way we think, feel, and choose? We can choose to ignore our own needs and hate ourselves. Or we can

When we choose to treat ourselves harshly, do we make it easier to hear God calling, encouraging, challenging, healing?

I think not, for there are better ways.

We allow God to "empty" us of caring about things that don't matter, so that we're better able to turn down the static in our lives, hear God's call, and serve the neighbors God gives us.

Once my friend skipped mopping her floor and spent the time letting all the kids in her neighborhood fingerpaint on her patio. Another friend tried to invite someone over for a simple supper once a week, as a way of reaching out to people who could use a little extra care and attention.

Mr. Rogers sings, "There are many ways to say, 'I love you.'" How true of God's love for us and our love for others. When we pay careful attention to the ways in which God is nurturing us, when we really notice God's care for us, then new life becomes the hallmark of our care for others. The self that's being emptied is also being filled—with energy, love, and "the mind of Christ." ■

*Karen Burgess-Cassler, Peoria, Illinois, is a member of the Lutheran Deaconess Conference. She is a mother of three children.*

# Session 3

## Good News to the Poor

BECOMING  
GOD'S  
CHILDREN



Foster and Jannine McCurley

**Study Text: Luke 4:16-21**

In sessions 1 and 2, we looked at the new creation that occurred in Jesus Christ. We discussed what it means to become the new creation here and now: the church. We learned, too, how important it is to regard one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. In sessions 3 through 5, we'll study Jesus' teachings about stewardship. This session explores Jesus' message of good news to everyone in need. Session 4 discusses the responsible distribution of our financial resources as the way that a prudent steward returns to God what belongs to God. Session 5 reviews how stewardship is part of our becoming God's new creation.

### **Opening prayer:**

*Almighty and most merciful God, we call to mind before you all those whom it would be easy to forget: the homeless, the destitute, the sick, the aged, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, O God, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Adapted from Lutheran Book of Worship, page 44.)*

## Understanding the Word

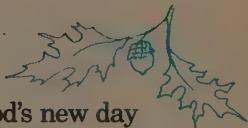
story in Luke 4:16-21 is about Jesus' first recorded visit as an adult to his hometown, Nazareth. Jesus had just finished his ordeal in the wilderness with the devil (the temptation), emerged from that testing prepared to begin a ministry that would take him to the cross.

Still under the power of the Spirit, Jesus went into Galilee, where he had spent almost all of his life (verse 14). One Sabbath day he went to the synagogue where he had worshiped as a child and as a young man (verse 16). Jesus was selected for this service to read aloud a passage from the Scriptures. He then told the people a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah.

**Read aloud Luke 4:18-19.**

# 1

*How does this passage compare with Isaiah 61:1-2? Now turn to Isaiah 58:6-7. What themes are included in verse 6 in the calling "let the oppressed go free"?*



The prophecy from Isaiah 61:1-2 tells about God's new day coming, the day when God would set things right. It would be a day when God would turn things upside-down and make just the opposite of what it was in the time the words were spoken.

This passage from Isaiah about God reversing life provided the test for Jesus' brief, one-sentence sermon in Nazareth, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). With these words Jesus announced the start of that new era.

There would be good news for the poor, release for captives, sight to the blind, and liberty for the oppressed. He told the people that the reign of God had begun. The lame would walk, lepers would be cleansed. The deaf would hear and the dead would be raised up (see Matthew 11:2-5).

In ancient times, people who were poor, blind, oppressed, or outcasts were outcasts. It was believed that God looked on them with disfavor.

Yet every once in a while, some light broke through. A prophet here or there recognized that the people who were excluded



## Bible study

in the present time would be the ones included in the reign of God to come (read Micah 4:6-7).

# 2

*Based on the passages you have read from Luke and Isaiah, where do you find evidence of the reign of God breaking into our world today?*

Jesus announced that the new time had come and was beginning in him. This was good news to the poor, for it meant that those who had been excluded would now be included. Those who had been prevented from joining the community would now be the center of the community. Those who had known only bad news could expect something good.

### ***Interpreting the Word*** **God's Today and Today's Poor**

Jesus' use of the word *today* in Luke 4:21 gives immediacy to his message. It means that Jesus read from the Scripture—what we call the Old Testament—and announced that his ministry *right then and there* was the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Our yesterdays have shaped who we are. The past has led us in certain directions—some happy, and others unhappy. The unhappy things we have experienced sometimes make us wonder about the uncertainty of the road we have traveled or are about to travel.

Tomorrow is the time to come. It is the future, which can either be threatening or challenging to us. When we hear about God's promises for the future, for the new time, we hear a message of hope.

*Today* is the time in which we live. It is the time of the church, which means that it is the time between the ministry of Jesus and the final fulfillment of God's plans for the world. *Today* is the time when we carry the message of Jesus and minister to and with those who are in need.



## 3

*Are there some of the people today who hear and experience bad news?*

The message of Jesus includes what he will do tomorrow, and what God did through Jesus in the past. It also announces how what God does for us and for others today. God is neither a relic from the past, nor a vague dream of the future. God is alive and well today in the time of the church.

### **Living the Word God's Messengers**



We are God's messengers to the needy. That is a means of grace by which we become faithful stewards of God's children on the earth. Television and other media enable us to know what is happening in many places at the same time, all over the globe. At times, this vast knowledge of the problems in the world makes the world and the size of our task seem overwhelming.

How can we be ministers of God to such a vast number of people and needy persons? Perhaps it helps to think of our ministry in two ways. First, we minister to those we can touch and see firsthand through our personal contacts. Our ministry can take place as near as our home and our own backyard. Or it can happen down the block in our congregations, or just around the corner.

## 4

*Who in your own congregation or community could be described as someone "in the middle"?*

It is sometimes said that the best artists and writers are the ones who communicate through their works some of the struggles of life. They are often moved by what comes out in their works, because we sense the feeling that lies behind the art itself.

Communication works best when the

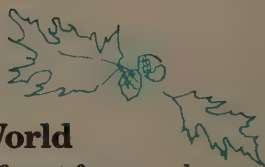
## Bible study

*sender of the message is on the same wavelength as the hearer. How can we communicate to those who are poor unless we can recognize times in our lives when we too have felt poor?*

*Think about the meaning of the word poor. It can be interpreted in different ways. However, we need to begin by thinking of those who have been deprived of financial resources, for their lot is harsh and cruel. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ who need our compassion. Another understanding of poor has to do with day-to-day struggles and being deeply frustrated, blocked, oppressed, closed off. However, being poor can also mean that people are being prevented from being the persons they know they can be. Which interpretation of poor can you relate to?*

## 5

*What kinds of events in your life have made you feel poor? Imagine yourself in the situations described in the last paragraph. How do Jesus' words that the Lord "has anointed me to preach good news to you" sound in those situations? What comfort do they bring to you and your life—in past or present situations? What difference do those words make? Remember that the one who spoke those words is one who willingly became poor. (Read Philippians 2:5-11 and Luke 9:58.) The one who spoke the words is the one who has been there, too.*



## Ministries in Our Society and World

Bringing good news to the "poor" takes on different forms and shapes in the society and world in which we live. Often we need to deal with structures, systems, and ways of thinking and operating that may create some obstacles. As good stewards concerned for the well-being of all people of God's creation, we need to face those obstacles with persistence, patience, and tenacity.



Perhaps you and/or your study group could think about the issues that could empower you to advocate for the needs of people less fortunate than you. Think of social, public, or environmental issues and others related to hunger and human rights.

There are many resources available for raising awareness about poverty in the United States and around the globe. Local organizations in your area or Lutheran social service agencies in your county or state may be able to offer new insights.

This information may empower you to bring good news to the lonely, afflicted, or isolated people whom you have identified as the poor in your community, and to reach out beyond the poor who live farther away.

Other advocacy groups with local chapters such as Bread for the World, Amnesty International or Habitat for Humanity may be able to assist you. What advocacy groups are there in your area?

As we reach out to people in need beyond our own communities, working together with other church groups as well as groups outside the church is often important. It takes working together with others in order to achieve justice for all, for justice is the form that love takes in the face of the crucified Lord.

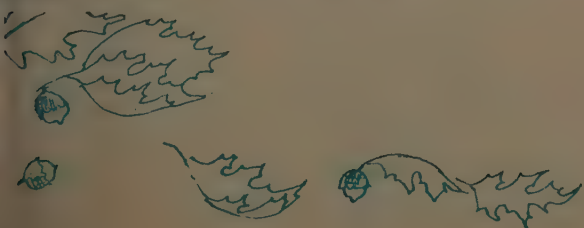
Whenever we serve a precious child of God who is in need, as members of the body of Christ "bring good news to the world."

## Looking Ahead

In our next session we'll look more deeply at stewardship itself as we study two New Testament parables: the story of the dishonest steward, and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Luke 16:1-9 and 19:31 tell the stories.

In the month ahead, pray for those who are less fortunate than you and for those who work to alleviate their suffering. ■

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# Discovery

Karen Melang

**I** will never forget a Sunday-school class of bright and eager fourth-graders I once taught. When I asked them, "Where is the church on Sunday afternoon?" I saw the light go on in a small pair of eyes. I heard the voice behind the eyes say, "I bet the church is at home, or at grandma's, or out playing football in the yard."

Yes, yes, I thought. Then many lights went on, and they all shouted at once. The church is not a building, they told me, but people, people who are likely to be doing all kinds of things on a Sunday afternoon. I will never forget the surprise and delight that I saw in their eyes as they discovered this new idea.

But discovery is not always an occasion for joy. Some discoveries, for instance, are baffling. I remember about 15 years ago when my baby daughter was learning that she could make her hands grab things and hold them. One day as her tub was filling, she grabbed a handful of water, just as she had grabbed cereal, vegetables and toys. When there was nothing in her hands, she looked up at me, astounded. "Why didn't this work?" her eyes asked, long before she could talk.

Sometimes discoveries are worse than puzzling. They can be disheartening, even excruciating. I have a friend who is discovering what it means to have cancer. Through all of her testing, we have steadfastly hoped to discover that the tests were misread, or that a drug will be found that can dispatch her disease quickly. So far there have been no such discoveries.

The women who went to the tomb on Easter morning thought they were beyond discovering anything. They had discovered quite enough already, they thought, as they recalled their Lord's suffering from their agonizing vantage point at the foot of the cross.

That first Easter morning the women were beginning to understand what it would mean to live with the awful fact that Jesus was dead, along with all their hopes. At dawn that day they had only enough energy to worry about the massive



stone at the tomb's entrance, which would prevent them from doing one last deed for their dead friend. They hoped only to discover someone who could move the stone from the tomb's entrance. Beyond the stone, they already knew what they would find.

When our churches today are filled with Easter lilies, when the eggs have been colored, and when Easter morning comes as usual, it is nearly impossible for us to imagine the astonishment of the women on that first Easter. Instead of a cold, dead body, angels greeted them, asking, "Why are you looking for the living in a cemetery?" And telling them, "Jesus is not here. He is risen!"

The women who came prepared for funeral rituals gave themselves over to the wonder of resurrection.

In our lives we may find ourselves discovering all kinds of things—some splendid, others devastating. At times we may seem to discover nothing at all. Sometimes the resurrection's power will give us the courage we need to face our deadly enemies, and sometimes we will yawn through Easter sermons.

No matter what we discover as our lives unfold, we can be sure of this: In Jesus Christ, God has discovered us, no matter how lost we have been, or how often we have tried to hide. And because God has found us, our resurrected Lord Jesus promises that beyond the grave we will slip out of death's grasp as surely as the water slipped out of my daughter's hands. ■

*Karen Melang, trained as a deaconess at Valparaiso University, Indiana, is a professional communicator at the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension. She is married and has two children, ages 13 and 16.*



*Beginning with the next issue of LWT, Karen Melang and Donna Hacker Smith will alternate as writers of the "Give Us This Day" column.*



# Ambiguities

Donna Hacker Smith



arch is a relentlessly ambiguous month.

On one hand, it confronts me with stores full of spring clothes even as cold weather ambushes me when I step outside. How tempting those light-weight pastels look in a season of gray skies and dark blue wools. How daring and bare those open-toed shoes and sandals seem compared to thick-soled boots!

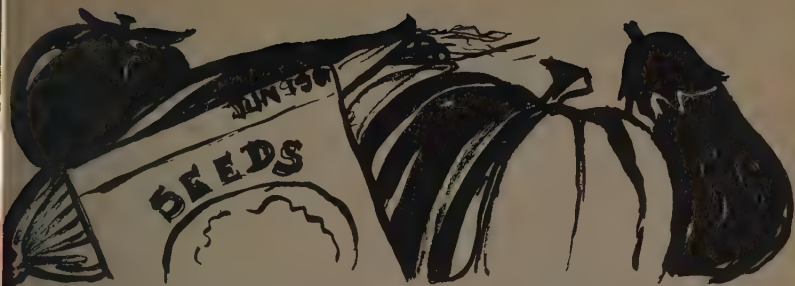
March has a spiritual ambiguity, also. Faced with the Lenten schedule and discipline, I grow impatient. The Bible study and meditation of the season leave me painfully aware of my own sinfulness. There is a bleakness of outlook which seems to weigh me down. All my fine Lenten resolutions of last year, all my promises to seek a more mature spirituality, seem to have fallen by the wayside once again. How I long for a word of absolution, of new life, which can renew me and restore me to spiritual optimism!

And yet, even in March comes a hint of hope. The winter chill is tempered by the hint of a warming breeze. The Sunday morning and Wednesday night fellowship and worship experiences suggest brighter days ahead. As the month unfolds, more tangible signs of a better tomorrow come to light.

One of my favorite signs of hope was a recent discovery. As a child of urban apartment life, the process of planting, growing and harvesting was alien to me. Since my marriage and move to Freeport, Illinois, I've discovered a new world: one of seeds and transplanting, saplings and shrubs, mulching and weeding. And at the end of it all abundant tomatoes, beans, cucumbers, corn and peppers. It all begins in March, when the first seed catalogs arrive with their colorful portfolios.

Curled up with a stack of catalogs, I plot and plan this year's experiments to complement the old dependable varieties. Even as I look out at our garden area, still covered by a sparse blanket of snow, I anticipate new life.

Hidden from my limited vision, nature takes its course, and last year's spent plants, dried vines, and other waste are becoming part of the soil. A nourishing place is being prepared for the seeds we have yet to order. We have only to plan, and till, plant, water—and wait.



True, lively surprises will thwart our carefully plotted geometry as "volunteers" will once again spring forth from the previous year's forgotten seeds. Direction and "order" will come as the garden wills, with tomatoes discovered amidst the egg-plant. Or a persistent pumpkin vine will weave its way between the rows of corn.

I recognize similar signs of quiet preparations in the Lenten process of study, prayer, meditation and confession. How can the good word of Easter take root in my heart, grow and produce a harvest, without the proper cultivation? Remembering this, my Lenten disciplines come to be less of a burden and more of a joy. I work to prepare my heart for the seed that will be planted when the great news of the Resurrection comes on Easter Sunday. What seemed bleak now brims with hope because of a God who reveals life where it seemed not.

Ah, the ambiguities of March: a seemingly frozen, dead area of our yard that was last year's garden; a cold and weary winter of the spirit, born of human sinfulness. Still, even in the midst of the ambiguities, I sense the miraculous capabilities of God. In the darkest of gardens, even one with a tomb, God brings forth life. The directions the new life will take, the ways it will change and renew all who encounter it, are breathtaking. For it is in the darkest, bleakest, coldest of gardens that the most startling resurrection takes place.

John's gospel tells us that Mary Magdalene mistook her risen Lord for the gardener. Contemplating the frozen garden outside and my dormant spiritual garden within, and sensing the resurrection soon to take place, I wonder if she wasn't right after all.

*The Rev. Donna Hacker Smith is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church in Freeport, Illinois. She and her husband, Judge Lawrence Smith, enjoy country living and their family of cats.*

*Donna Hacker Smith and Karen Melang will alternate as "Give Us This Day" columnists beginning next month.*



## Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

### ♦ Lutherans in Malawi send evangelist to Zambia

The nine-year-old Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi has sent an evangelist to Lusaka, Zambia, to help with mission work. Festom Mzenga Phiri was among the first young people involved in founding the church in Malawi in 1982. He worked in several different capacities as a layperson before training as an evangelist. He will help Zambian Lutherans with training, stewardship, youth work and choir organization.

*Thank you, Lord, for the outreach of churches still young themselves. Bless their ministries.*

### ♦ Exhibit lauds ministry of all women

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Commission for Women is sponsoring a permanent traveling exhibit on women's contributions to the church. Titled "It Didn't All Begin with Ordination: Women's Contributions to ELCA History," the photo exhibit captures a variety of the many ways in which women have ministered in the church throughout history. The exhibit is available for rental to congregations through Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, Audiovisual (code AV-5351).

*Loving Lord, you have given the church many talented women throughout the years. Let the church be ever open to these gifts.*

### ♦ ELCA congregations develop social ministries

ELCA congregations in several synods are planning a five-year emphasis on social ministry. The emphasis involves recruitment, biblical studies, liturgical worship, communion studies, action plans and coalition with people who lack power or resources. The program carries out the ELCA constitution's declaration that the church be inclusive and diverse and that it work toward a just and sustainable society.

*O Giver of All Gifts, you have provided us with much. Move us to use these gifts to promote peace and justice for all your creation.*

### ♦ Indian Lutherans to ordain women

The United Evangelical Lutheran churches in India agreed to ordain their first women this year. The women will be placed in the pastoral ministry and in specialized ministries such as hospital chaplaincy, Sunday school ministry and Christian education. The churches devised a plan to employ the ordained women immediately and commit themselves to contribute financially to women's theological education.

*Guide these women in their ministries, O God, and bless their work.*

Look for people and issues in the local, national and international news to add to your daily prayer list.

*Sonia C. Groenewold is news editor of The Lutheran.*



# Sharing Our Stories

Myrna Sheie

ng the last few years, I have led y adult forums, but one espe- y seems to draw people in. It's d "Over a Cup of Coffee: The Sto- of God's People." During the ; we tell stories: a favorite bibli- story, the story of a saint in our s, and our own story. For many le, that hour is the first time 've intentionally shared stories. ring our own story of faith may ifficult at first, but it is also very sifying. There is always laughter, there are often tears.

y sharing stories about our lives listening to the stories others we make discoveries about our- es and other people. We become orers who search lovingly for the facts of memory and experience. find pain and loneliness in some ers of our lives, but we also find and strength in once-forgotten es.

Each of us—whoever we are—has

a story to tell. Robert Coles (in *The Call of Stories*, Houghton Mifflin, 1989), quotes the poet William Carlos Williams: "Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them." Lewis Carroll said it another way. He called stories "love gifts."

We often call stories conversation. Martin Luther wrote once that he felt the conversation of Christian people could almost have been called a "third means of grace." During a mission trip to Denver last summer, Philip, my 15-year-old son, discovered how lonely life can be without the "love gift" of conversation. Several of the youth from our congregation spent the day serving at a soup kitchen. At the end of the noon meal, Philip began to clean tables. A man sat nearby. As he ate, he clutched a bag containing a trom-



**E**ach of us—  
whoever we  
are—has a story  
to tell. Lewis  
Carroll called  
stories "love  
gifts."



**S**tory-sharing  
requires no  
special  
equipment or  
training. Best  
of all, stories  
can happen  
anywhere.

bone, trumpet, and clarinet. Interested, Philip struck up a conversation, asking, "Did you enjoy your meal?"

The man looked up, paused, and said, "This was nourishment, not a meal. You need love to have a meal."

How important are the loving ears of other people? They are essential to our lives. Not only do they make a meal possible, they also help us to share our journeys. I remember a sermon that Janet Hunt, now a pastor in Illinois, preached when she was a seminary student. She said, "The stories of faith are all around you, right next to you—ready to surprise you, uplift you, encourage you. And the incredible thing is, once the story has been shared, those people . . . enter into a journey that is shared."

Sometimes such journeys seem risky both for the teller and the listener. The risk of change, however, is small compared to the richness that our discoveries—and our changes—bring to our lives. All my life I will remember Rajak, a young man I met on a Lutheran World Relief study trip to India in 1987. He was guide and translator for our group of 13 North Americans. At the time we met, Rajak was 27, a Hindu, and de-

lightfully inquisitive. We talked for hours as we bumped along rural roads in northern India. We told him about life in North America and about the Christian faith. He told us about India, its people, and its customs.

We also shared our stories. Rajak was a powerful one—the story of a young man who ran away from the poverty of his home when he was 11. His was the story of a boy who had pulled rickshaws, lived on the streets, and put himself through school. He told his story over many days. He told it thoughtfully and with good humor. None of us suspected that we were the first to hear his story. And none of us suspected what telling his story meant to Rajak.

On our last night together, we said our farewells formally to Rajak and our other guide, Ashok. Afterwards we sat outside on a small patio and talked. Rajak tearfully told several of us what we had meant to him. Later that night I wrote in my journal, "Our group has prompted Rajak to ask questions about his life. He told me he has functioned as a 'mechanical man.' He was never shown love as a child, so to risk caring and being genuine seemed too great. Yet with

has risked both." I pray for  
and his continuing story every

discovery of stories, of course,  
happen anywhere. We need only  
er person, a little bit of time,  
willingness to share. Several  
ago, I first heard my maternal  
mother's story during a half-  
drive with my mother: Inger  
Johnson emigrated from Nor-  
to America nearly 100 years  
She worked as a "hired girl" on  
s in the Midwest. During her  
years in this country, before she  
learned to speak English well,  
was sexually abused by the sons  
veral farmers. Yet she was able  
uild a strong, positive, and  
st-centered life. Her story was  
of strength, not defeat. In that  
hour, I received the "love story"  
e grandmother I never met.

Story-sharing requires no special  
ment or training. Stories can be  
—and heard—by people of every  
Best of all, stories can happen  
where. Sometimes stories begin  
a cup of coffee. Or in a waiting  
t. Or on a bus. You may find sto-  
in a hallway, in your backyard,  
the church parking lot. The best  
es always lead to other stories.  
g the way, they also surprise,  
ht and encourage us. Best of all,  
help to banish the loneliness  
in us. God bless your stories and  
discovery of other people's sto-

na Sheie serves the Saint Paul  
Synod of the Evangelical Lu-  
an Church in America as assis-  
to the bishop for administration.  
and her husband, Steve Sheie, a  
se, have two teenage sons "whose  
overies of self and others are won-  
us to behold!"

# LifeStories

## LifeStories

### LifeStories

### LifeStories

**S**tory-sharing has inspired  
a board game. Called  
"LifeStories," it was devel-  
oped by three people—two  
of them Lutherans. The  
game has been used by fam-  
ilies, women's shelters,  
groups of friends, and con-  
gregations. One large met-  
ropolitan congregation uses  
it for new-member orienta-  
tion session. Response to  
"LifeStories" has been en-  
thusiastic. Whatever the set-  
ting, people—ages 8 and  
up—love to tell their stories.

Persons interested in the  
game can purchase it at  
Augsburg Fortress locations  
or write to Family Narratives  
Distributors, Inc., P.O. Box  
27086, Golden Valley, MN  
55427. Include \$28.75 plus  
\$2.00 shipping and han-  
dling.—MS

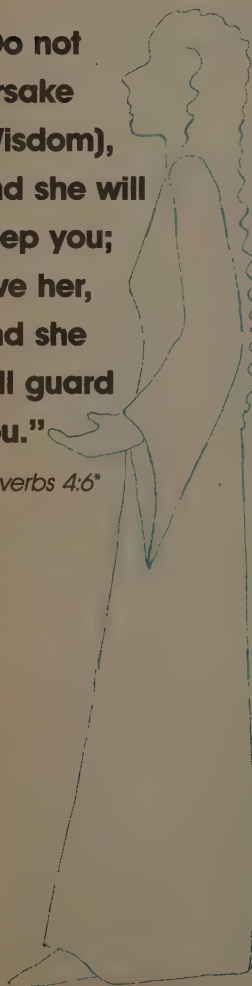


# Love Wisdom

Mary Ylvisaker Nilsen

**"Do not  
forsake  
(Wisdom),  
and she will  
keep you;  
love her,  
and she  
will guard  
you."**

*Proverbs 4:6\**



The Book of Proverbs has a delightful everyday practicality about it. In it we discover a God who is concerned with the day-to-day, providing us with wisdom for the decisions we make about our relationships and about our families. Proverbs also helps us find ways to become content and move forward on our spiritual journeys.

The writers of proverbs make it clear that the reason God is concerned with our lives is not so that God can judge or punish us when we fail, but because God is *for* us. God is ever-present, working to give us that which is best for us.

What kind of wisdom can we find in Proverbs? Most of the book contains simple, rule-of-thumb suggestions that can be used as

guidelines for our choices. These guidelines present a world in which all things are divided into good and bad, right and wrong, reward and punishment. There are no gray areas.

This simplicity seems to work against the much more complicated view of human nature and personal interactions presented in the rest of the Bible. And yet, if we see the proverbs for what they are—helpful guidelines—they can protect us from making mistakes and lead us into productive, hopeful lives, lives rooted in God.

## Wisdom for Our Relationships

Many of the proverbs have to do with our relationships to the world around us. For instance, we are told to "sing to a heart" is like "vine on a wound" (25:1). Or, "One who meddles in the quarrel of another" is "like someone who takes a passing dog by the ears" (26:17).

We are cautioned over and over again about our words: "Reckless words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (12:18). Proverbs

s against words of p, nagging, lying words that stir up le. Wise words are e that praise, cor- ovingly, and teach. e key to all rela- ships is summa- in Proverbs 10:12: red stirs up strife, love covers all of- es." In the same that love *requires* forgive, it also *en-* us to forgive. And the source of that will give us what eed to be able to let all our burdens of , anger, and resent- toward others.

### dom for Living family

ding to Proverbs, ose who trouble r households will rit wind" (11:29)— r will have nothing e end. The biblical sage is that fami- are important and are responsible to l for our family ose persons with m we live and work t closely).

n addition to this ning, Proverbs also es us the picture of ationship in mar- ge: an ideal that can sed to guide all our est relationships. nsider Proverbs 10-31, and what we learn about mar- ge from this picture wife. The relation-

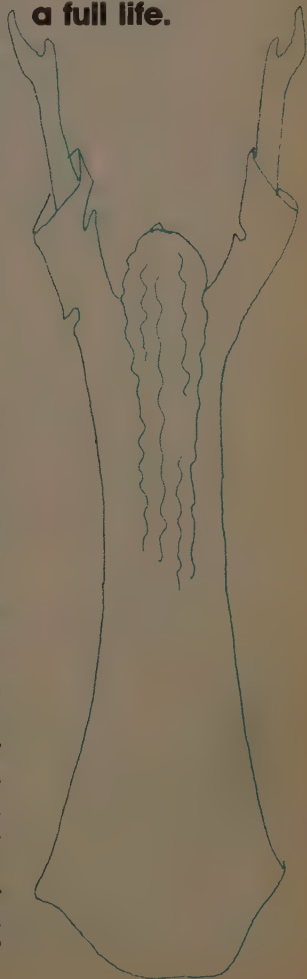
ship is described as a partnership, with each person having impor- tant work to do. Both earn and make deci- sions about the spend- ing of money. These verses speak of mutual respect and admira- tion, not control or dom- ination.

The relationship of parents and children is also discussed in some detail in Proverbs. Par- ents are advised to dis- cipline and correct their children. These verses have been used by many to justify harsh punishment of chil- dren, but a closer un- derstanding of the word *discipline* gives a different picture. Disci- pline comes from the Latin word for learn- ing, meaning to "grasp" or "apprehend." Disci- pline, then, requires teaching more than punishment. "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray" (22:6).

### Wisdom Leading to Contentment

Reading through the Book of Proverbs makes it quite clear that God cares about our emotional health and well-being. Prov- erbs 12:16 tells us, "Fools show their anger at once, but the pru- dent ignore an insult."

**In Proverbs 8,  
Wisdom  
stands at  
the city gates  
and calls  
to all who  
will listen,  
giving them  
words that  
will lead to  
a full life.**



**"If you close  
your ear to  
the cry of  
the poor,  
you will cry  
out and  
not be heard."**

*Proverbs 21:13*



\*All Proverbs quoted from the New Revised Standard Version.

How much emotional energy might we have saved over the years if we had learned to ignore insults?

Much of our loss of contentment comes because of worry. Proverbs 12:25 tells us, "Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up."

There are many verses in Proverbs that talk about anger—that emotion that distorts our vision and separates us from our better selves, from others, and from God. "For as pressing milk produces curds, and pressing the nose produces blood, so pressing anger produces strife" (30:33). The writer may have been talking about stirring up anger in relationships, or might have been referring to the anger we stir up in ourselves.

### **Wisdom for Our Spiritual Journeys**

"... the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" (4:18). The wisdom of Proverbs can be a light on our path.

Proverbs 19:27 tells us to continue to learn, to "cease straying . . . from the words of knowledge." Our spiritual journey is fueled

by reading and reflection, listening and contemplating, and then by doing, by practice.

We also learn that we should "not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring" (27:1). In more popular language, we are to live "one day at a time."

Finally, we learn from Proverbs 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. Trust, listen to God, and the wisdom of God will "make straight your paths" (3:6).

The Book of Proverbs presents a God who is intimately involved in and concerned about our everyday lives. Study it. Discover wisdom. Practice its teachings. It will be like good medicine, healing your wounds. ■

*Mary Ylvisaker Nilsson is an author of several biblical and historical studies, including a book on Proverbs. Her latest book, A Time for Peace: Daily Meditations on the Twelve-Step Living (Zion, 1990; \$8.95), offers meditations based on texts from the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and is available through Augsburg Fortress publications.*



# REVIEWS

## United Questions:

### Being a Christian

by Rosemary Radford Ruether  
(New York: 1989; \$10.95).

With a personal and engaging style, theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether carefully reweaves the varied threads of her religious and intellectual experience. She uses discrete chapters to trace what means to her to be a Roman Catholic, a member of the Judeo-Christian tradition, an American believer and a feminist.

With each new understanding she expands her ability to reclaim and integrate ideas, rather than escape or reject them. Whether Ruether is a new acquaintance or familiar to the reader, there is much to discover in this reissue of a 1982 book.

*Kathryn Christenson  
St. Peter, Minnesota*

## Choice Is Always Ours

edited by Dorothy Berkley,  
Elizabeth Boyden  
and Lucille M. Nixon  
(New York: Harper & Row, 1989; \$12.95).

This splendid book is a paperback edition of one first published in 1948. It is a precious gift to those who wish to pursue "The Way" and who perceive it as a journey, not a destination.

The volume is an anthology of hundreds of quotations from sources as varied as May Sarton, Nikos Kazantzakis, Oscar Wilde, Evelyn Underhill, the prolific "Anonymous" and



the Bible. The entries are an interesting mix suggesting various approaches to spirituality. The book is organized so that those with a particular interest may turn to sections such as "Prayer and Meditation" or "Fellowship." This book should be slowly studied and savored.

*Virginia Knudtson  
Prescott, Arizona*

## What to Do When You Can't Do It All

by Carol Van Klompenburg  
(Augsburg, 1989; \$8.95).

Do you feel overcommitted and harried by the tasks of your everyday life? Are you a fellow comrade in the battle of overcommitment?

In an honest and highly readable

manner, the author urges the reader to examine the "shoulds and shouldn'ts" of our lives, remembering that we are "forgiven, not driven." We are encouraged to rediscover "God's gift of *good enough*."

*Karen Birkedal  
Hull, Iowa*

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### **Meet the Prophets**

by John W. Miller (Paulist Press, 1987; \$12.95).

Readers willing to be transformed by the knowledge of God, daring an inner renewal, can find in the Old Testament prophetic books a living message that is relevant today.

Whether for personal reflection, Sunday school teaching, or group study, this "Beginner's Guide to the Books of the Biblical Prophets" will enrich one's understanding of the prophets, their times and messages.

*Phyllis Beckman  
Park Forest, Illinois*

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### **Confidence**

by Alan Loy McGinnis  
(Augsburg, 1987; \$4.95).

Many popular psychologists are eager to share their secrets for achieving confidence. McGinnis gives his suggestions in a Christian context. The 12 practical rules he offers build self-esteem, not self-worship. McGinnis emphasizes that individuals can help themselves toward greater confidence, but does not overlook the role of God's power to change a person.

*Dixie Banitt  
Shawnee, Kansas*

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**The Calling of the Laity**  
by Verna Dozier (The Alban Institute, 1988; \$12.95).

This anthology of articles is very effective in encouraging "unordained ministers" in daily service. "Witnes is not just a weekend hobby," notes one article. "It is just as important around the office water cooler as the communion rail." The article on the difference between a "close church and one which recognizes laity ministry should be required reading for every pastor and church council.

*C. B. Alexander  
Rapid City, South Dakota*

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**An Introduction to  
the Old Testament:  
A Feminist Perspective**  
by Alice L. Laffey (Fortress, 1988; \$12.95).

Laffey examines over 40 Old Testament stories relating to women: heroines, widows, wives, mothers, prostitutes, oppressed and exalted women—many unnamed. With chapters devoted to Pentateuch, Deuteronomistic history, prophetic and writings, Laffey gives brief attention to conventional historical and literary considerations before moving on to a more thorough discussion of feminist themes and detailed interpretation of the texts.

This book is a very readable and helpful resource.

*Karla J. Juncos  
Ypsilanti, Michigan*

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### **Broken Cord**

Michael Dorris (Harper, 1987; \$9.95).

A moving account of the parent-  
f of a Native American child with  
Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) will  
re your heart and mind. Dorris,  
self a Native American, adopted  
n in 1971. Patience and accep-  
e come with difficulty. One can-  
read this account without pro-  
d respect for the author and an  
htened understanding of FAS.

Alice Otterness Thoresen  
Auburn, Washington

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### **Journaling: A Spirit Journey**

Anne Broyles (Upper Room,  
1987; \$6.95).

Journaling, Broyles explains, is  
at sharing our "true selves" with  
and strengthening our faith.  
Journaling can be a meaningful com-  
munion to prayer, Bible study, medi-  
tation or fasting.

Broyles introduces six journaling  
methods, including examining daily  
experiences, reflecting on Scripture,  
guided meditations, and exploring  
dreams. Special bonuses are the  
chapter bibliographies that close each  
chapter and the blank pages to jour-  
nal.

Cathy Connors-Nelson  
Kintre, North Dakota

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### **A Time for Risking: Priorities for Women**

Miriam Adeney (Multnomah  
Press, 1987; \$7.95).

In a world that grabs us from many  
directions, *A Time for Risking* is a  
voice in the wilderness calling us to  
action. The author's battle cry is to  
serve Christ by serving our fellow  
human being—next door and  
abroad.

The book is filled with practical  
pointers on how to set God-centered  
priorities, actively study the Bible,  
say no to some things in order to say  
yes to God's will, manage time, care  
for a home and nurture children—  
while serving God's kingdom. This  
book is worth the risk.

Julie Kelly  
Palatka, Florida

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### **The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Society**

by Eberhard Jungel, translated by  
Roy Harrisville  
(Augsburg, 1988; \$10.95).

Although only 92 pages long, *The  
Freedom of a Christian* is heavy with  
theological thoughts and ideas. Sub-  
titled *Luther's Significance for Con-  
temporary Theology*, Eberhard Jun-  
gel delves into the core of Luther's  
theology. He discusses at length two  
of Luther's statements: "A Christian  
is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject  
to none" and "A Christian is a per-  
fectly dutiful servant of all, subject to  
all." For anyone interested in deep  
theological issues, this is a stimulat-  
ing book.

Lynn Ronsberg  
Brainerd, Minnesota

*Unless otherwise noted, books re-  
viewed in LWT can be obtained  
through your local library or book-  
store, or by contacting your nearest  
Augsburg Fortress location.*

# Namibian Graduates Return Home

Diane Minor

Namibia enters its second year of freedom this March with a new group of young leaders who are recent graduates of colleges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They are the first of 100 students who will eventually receive a free education at ELCA colleges.

"I am firmly convinced that out of this group of students will come the leaders and movers of Namibia in the future," said Ann Hoberg of the ELCA Division for Education. Hoberg coordinates the program titled "ELCA Higher Education and Namibia Project."

"We'll be filling empty spaces in government and education left by the South Africans," Morina Karingombe said as she and Paulina Elago helped recently with an orientation event for new students. Both young women are 1990 graduates of Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois—Karingombe in social work and Elago in business.

"The longer I stayed here the more sure I became that I wanted to serve my people," said Elago. She will follow a family tradition: her older sister, Nashilongo Elago, has been a leader in a Namibian ecumenical

women's organization. The April 1988 Lutheran Woman Today carried an interview with the elder Elago about the situation of women in Namibia.

Elago and Karingombe return to Namibia with strong skills to support their high hopes. While home breaks during their years in the United States, both young women challenged and prevailed over White shopkeepers who initially refused to sell them merchandise. "Their experiences in the U.S. helped them do that," said Naomi Linnell, assistant director for colleges in the ELCA Division for Education.

Their strong command of the English language also reflects the years on an American campus—these young women even pepper their speech with the slang phrases of American students, such as "lil" and "you know."

Mastering English is no small feat considering that in their homeland some of the Namibian students were beaten for speaking English rather than their tribal language or South Africa's Afrikaans, said Linnell.

The education available to Black at government-sponsored schools





Namibia has been inferior in every respect—the buildings, staff, books and equipment, said Hoberg.

It may be a long time before Namibia achieves its goal of providing adequate education to every student through age 16. The newly-independent country is still saddled with international debt incurred during the time it was under South Africa's illegal control.

Because the education provided at the University of Namibia had not been available to Blacks, they have attended universities in neighboring countries. "A lot of my peers went to study in South Africa, and school was often interrupted by demonstrations. Then students would have to go home, not knowing when they could return," said Karingombe.

The education provided to the Namibian students in the United States is funded by the 26 ELCA participating colleges and a United States German development agency. The program is administered by ELCA staff.

Leaders of two Lutheran churches and the Namibian Council of Churches help select participants for the project. "It's a great contribution to the development of our country," said Bishop Hendrik Frederik of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia. More than 40 percent of all Namibians are Lutheran.

Bishop Frederik says the country still needs these young leaders to address three pressing social problems: homelessness among rural poor;

farm workers who are treated like slaves; and a 60 percent illiteracy rate among women.

Even now that Namibia's independence has been achieved, its people still need the support of people of the ELCA. "We're sometimes fickle in our enthusiasms," said Linnell. "There was such support before independence, when things were so bad.

"They're still our sisters and brothers, and there is still poverty and struggle and the vestiges of the apartheid system. Our commitment and love toward each other should continue to grow."

That commitment and love continues through our support for the students still attending ELCA colleges. Gifts to the ELCA Designated Gift



*I am firmly convinced that out of this group of students will come the leaders and movers of Namibia in the future.*

—Ann Hoberg

Program #34, "Higher Education and Namibia," go to assist the students. The students are available to speak to local congregations. (For a list of contacts, see the Namibia poster in the January 1990 Mission: Ac-



*Paulina Elago, a 1990 graduate of Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, is returning to Namibia to pursue a career in business.*

tion packet or call the colleges directly).

The ELCA commitment also continues through the Campaign in Support of Women in Namibia, sponsored jointly by Women of the ELCA and the ELCA Commission for Women. At its First Triennial Convention, Women of the ELCA donated a van to women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia. The gift was funded through the Women of the ELCA Designated Gifts program. [A gift to Designated Gifts Program #527 for Specific Ministries of Women of the ELCA will go to the Campaign in Support of Women in Namibia.]

Women of the ELCA also funded an oral history project for women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (the church in northern Namibia), according to Joan Pope,

Women of the ELCA director for peace and justice, who recently returned from a trip to Namibia.

Through the Woman to Woman program, Fenny Hamhola and Sally Shivute of Namibia visited Iowa and

Georgia, respectively. Now they will identify development projects in Namibia that will be coordinated with the ELCA synods they visited.

Karingombe's young brother Dawid contributed drawings for a Namibia bulletin insert which was included in the Winter 1991 Women of the ELCA packet as well as the January-February 1991 *Action Packet*. He is a senior triple major in art, biology and political science at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota.

As the Karingombes and Paulina Elago return to their country now, they are reuniting

with family members they have not seen in 15 years, including sisters and brothers and uncles who have been in exile in other countries.

Morina Karingombe sums up their attitude toward the immediate future when she says, "I'm looking forward to the unknown." ■

*Diane Minor, Oak Park, Illinois, is an associate director for interpretation with the ELCA Commission for Communication.*



# MISSION:

## Action

One of the joys of reading is coming across an idea that provides a serendipitous *aha* moment! That happened to me the other day while reading *Illiteracy: A National Dilemma* (Cambridge Book Co., 1997) by David Harman. Harman writes, "Let's name the enemies of literacy instead of labeling literacy as the enemy!"

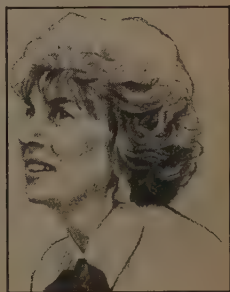
In recent months, much public attention has been focused on literacy. U. S. first lady Barbara Bush's interest in the problem produced much of the media coverage. In 1995, President George Bush held a national education summit. In many states, governors and their spouses have identified literacy as a priority, and state literacy conferences have been held. This media blitz has produced headlines such as "Attack illiteracy," "Combat illiteracy," "Wipe out illiteracy," "Stamp out illiteracy." All very warlike words—including the slogan, "Let's wage war on illiteracy." We are a nation that seems to feel that wars are an answer, or part of the answer, to any problem. I feel these slogans are like the "noisy things" of Amos 5:23!

Many recent efforts to eliminate illiteracy, though well-intentioned, have started with an incorrect premise and a misunder-

standing of what literacy—being literate—is all about. As Harman reminds us, illiteracy is not the enemy . . . it is the *by-product*, the *result* of the enemies of literacy.

What are those enemies? Unemployment or underemployment, health problems of all varieties (including not having access to adequate health care), inadequate housing, homelessness, financial problems, cultural values, community standards, personal attitudes, lack of support. The conditions that contribute to illiteracy are complex, systemic, and interwoven. There is no "quick fix," no easy answer. Another slogan, "A literate America by the year 2000," is unrealistic under the best of conditions. It is guaranteed to fail unless we also recognize the enemies of literacy, understand why they are enemies, and work to change the systems that—wittingly and unwittingly—support those enemies. ■

Faith  
Fretheim  
Director for  
Literacy



**ILLITERACY IS NOT THE ENEMY . . . IT IS THE  
BY-PRODUCT, THE RESULT OF THE ENEMIES OF LITERACY.**

## MISSION:

# Growth

**A**t a recent service I attended, a congregation struggled to answer the question of what was needed to renew its members and its mission. One brave woman answered, "Hope and the ability to show feelings and share experiences both good and bad." As the members of the congregation prepared to pray, the pastor asked for the gift of rediscovery.

For each of us, rediscovering the presence of God in our lives begins with examining the Word. Jesus' message about the kingdom of God is one of challenge and compassion, tenderness and delight. This message has left in the heart of believers a deep, abiding joy that is understood as a sign of God's constant presence and faithfulness to the people of God.

Hope, joy and gladness are feelings often experienced in a community of believers. Yet the history of God's people is also filled with the tears of repentance, injustice and exile.

Tears and laughter are part of our human experience from earliest days, signaling some of our deepest emotions. As gifts from God, they are also gifts to others. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:15,

"Rejoice with those who rejoice weep with those who weep." To discover and learn the beauty of laughter and tears as an adult to let these expressions clean and nourish us. Key to the expression of emotion is trust in our relationships with God and with one another.

"Gifted with Tears and Laughter," a program or retreat resource prepared by Women of the ELCA affirms the importance of expressing these two emotions and encourages participants to share them with one another. Through biblical reflection, stories, discussion, hymns, and a litany of reconciliation, this new resource in the Gifted Series affirms emotion as a healthy response to situations and offers participants suggestions on "where do we go from here?"

This resource is available from Augsburg Fortress locations for \$1.50 (code 2-9050), or call 1-800-328-4648.

*Cryta Wille*  
*Mission:*  
*Growth*



**"GIFTED WITH TEARS AND LAUGHTER" AFFIRMS  
THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPRESSING THESE TWO EMOTIONS.**



# MISSION:

# Community

summer Women of the ELCA  
 ived 27 international women  
 25 countries as guests in our  
 odical Women's Organizations.  
 s experience—Part 1 of the Wom-  
 to Woman program—under-  
 ed the importance and fruits of  
 ld mission efforts.

he good news of Jesus Christ,  
 t spoken and lived by missionar-  
 in their countries, was now clear-  
 roclaimed to us by the daughters  
 l granddaughters of those who  
 rd the Word long ago. Our grand-  
 thers and mothers devoted them-  
 ves to world mission through  
 men's missionary societies. In the  
 man to Woman program we saw  
 e fruits of these labors.

During 1991 and 1992, Women of  
 e ELCA will make a return visit.  
 Part 2 of the Woman to Woman  
 ogram, 27 American women will  
 it partner churches.

The purpose of the Woman to  
 oman exchange program is to  
 strengthen relationships and shar-  
 g between Women of the ELCA  
 d the women of the Lutheran  
 urches in Asia, Africa, Europe, and  
 entral and South America. This is  
 ing done through face-to-face vis-  
 s and follow-up letters and con-  
 ts.

Every woman who visits in the  
 oman to Woman program makes a  
 mmitment to travel and speak  
 hen she returns. Watch for an-  
 nouncements in the Women of the  
 LCA Newsletter and your synodi-

cal newsletter. The chosen represen-  
 tatives will become vital links in our  
 relationship and sharing between  
 Lutheran women around the world!

To be considered as a Woman to  
 Woman participant for the return  
 visits, write or call for an application:

Woman to Woman

Application Request

Women of the ELCA

8765 W. Higgins Road

Chicago, IL 60631,

or call (312) 380-2734.

Deadlines for submission of applica-  
 tions and notification of applicants  
 are as follows:

## **March 1, 1991**

Applications due to synodical selec-  
 tion committee.

## **April 1, 1991**

Synodical selection committee rec-  
 ommendations due to joint selection  
 committees.

## **April 15, 1991**

Joint selection committee recom-  
 mendations due to churchwide selec-  
 tion committee.

## **June 1, 1991**

Visitors and alternates selected and  
 notified by churchwide selection  
 committee ■

*Kwang-Ja Yu*  
*Director for Ecumenical*  
*and Cross-Cultural Programming*

# Invitation from a Clown

Laurie Hanson

Look at me

and read a resurrection story—  
it's there in the greasepaint.

Out of the emptiness  
of a face painted white,  
bright colors tell of life,  
life made new in Christ.

Listen with me

to a still small voice,  
a voice often left unheard.  
It's the voice that says,  
"I have called you by name,  
You are mine."

Speak with me

the language of faith,  
a language of more than words,  
learned slowly  
over the course of a lifetime.

Wonder with me

with the curiosity of a child,  
at the gifts God has placed all  
around us.

Even common things  
like water, bread, and wine,  
are uncommon, after all.

Laugh with me

as Sarah laughed,  
with delight and amazement  
at the surprises of God.  
Laugh with the joy  
that a newborn child brings.

Look beyond me

to a new creation,  
to what you and I  
have been called to be.  
Let others read a resurrection  
story  
on your face  
and in your life. ■

*Laurie Hanson, Hastings, Minnesota, holds a Master of Arts degree in Pastoral Theology and Ministry. She enjoys a ministry as "Rainbow" the clown.*

rate God's Creation" bags (see March or November 1990 LWTs) be ordered from this new address and phone number:  
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- Dovre; Chetek, Wisconsin

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The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised."

*Matthew 28:5  
New Revised  
Standard Version*

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